Cultural Solidarity and the Free Space of the Black Fraternity

by

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Abstract

This article analyzes and broadens discourse on the impact and links between culture and the emergence of social movements drawing upon the idea of cycle of protests to explain how African Americans were able to materialize, communicate, and ultimately sustain separate identities under antagonistic social conditions. The role "free space is critical to the understanding of this work in the shaping the identity of African Americans and the social movement which occurred as a result of their actions. Specifically, this article is a multifaceted account of Black Greek-letter organizations in how they formed in the Black community in relationship to how internal conflicts, hostile social and political environments, the creation of new organizations, and the dissemination of community grievances combined to create a conscious identity in the African American community.

Introduction

From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, Neoclassicism began to gain popularity among European societies. "Neoclassicism"[1] is the name given to the distinct movement in decorative and visual arts, literature, theatre, music, and architecture that draw upon Western classical art and culture (usually that of Ancient Greece or Ancient Rome). As a response to the Neo-Classical Movement, African American students in predominantly white colleges and historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) began to apply for and gain membership in Greek fraternities and sororities.[2] Once denied access to join Eurocentric Greek organizations, the necessity of a parallel Greek organization that mirrored African American social experience came into existence for African Americans.

Accordingly those organizations that were previously denied to Black students due to racial barriers and concurrent black codes soon became available.[3] Due to social mobility, status, and other privileges associated with membership into one of these organizations, many young African Americans began to gravitate toward the Black Letter Organizations in the hopes of transcending racial discrimination.[4]

In 1776 when Phi Beta Kappa became the first Greek-letter fraternity established at William and Mary College, it became an organization which evolved to become the standard for excellence in collegiate academics that spurred the formation of other fraternal organizations.[5] Thus, Greek-letter fraternities soon became a common site at many colleges and universities around the nation. Helen Horowriz author of the book, *Campus Life* writes:

> The fraternity had great appeal. For those undergraduates with the wealth, inclination, and leisure to join, the new Greek-lettered organizations gave a new area of privacy away from college eyes. In colleges founded by protestant denominations that demanded abstinence and self-denial, members could break the official code among trusted brothers. Fraternities provided the economic and social basis for feasts, strong drink, loose talk about women, card playing and gambling.[6]

Over time as the Greek-letter organization became more common; they evolved out of the image of Phi Beta Kappa. And between the years 1906 and 1920, seven of the nine most prominent Black Greek-letter fraternities and sororities were created at the collegiate level. The first of these African American fraternities was Alpha Phi Alpha, founded in 1906 at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.[7] Soon Alpha Kappa Alpha became the first Greek sorority for African American women formed in 1908 on the campus of Howard University in Washington D.C.[8] The fraternity Kappa Alpha Psi was chartered at Indiana University-Bloomington, in the spring of 1911.[9] Another fraternity named Omega Psi Phi was established at Howard University in the winter of 1911.[10] The sorority named Delta Sigma Theta was also incorporated on the campus of Howard University in 1913.[11] Additionally, the fraternity of Phi Beta Sigma was formed on the campus of Howard University in 1914;[12] its sister sorority, Zeta Phi Beta, was incorporated at Howard in 1920.[13] The early history of the college fraternal system lays the groundwork for the rise of various fraternities and sororities of the Black Greek-letter organizations.[14]

Hence, the purpose of this study is to explore and determine how the agency of African people has created a conscious attitude responsible for the development of a culture of mass protest. Within such organizations it is up to the individual members to choose which cultural elements they prefer to embody. And although a Black organization can exhibit both African and European cultural elements, it is ultimately the individuals within the organizations prerogative to gravitate toward a cultural identity that resonates most with its members.

And furthermore, the purpose and aim of this article is to refute the racist attitudes which seek to marginalize the African American community and to examine the aforementioned critical areas which gave birth to the creation of the first Black Greek-letter organizations, and to demonstrate how the Black Greek-letter organization emerged as a social organ of protest within the African American community. Hence, the four critical areas which will be examined are: 1) social grievances within a community, 2) the creation of the free space, 3) the framing of the organization in relation to other social movements, 4) and the personal orientation or cultural affiliation (agency) of the organizations' members. Subsequently, this study will analyze how internal conflicts, hostile social and political environments, the creation of new organizations, and the dissemination of community grievances combine to create an atmosphere which allows the African American community to create their own separate conscious identity. And central to this idea is that the use and incorporation of frame alignment and the cycles of protest are acknowledge

Cultural Solidarity and Free Space

The Black Greek-letter organization is a social institution that is steeped in the traditions of classical Greek and Roman civilizations. Among those who support and validate the Black Greek-letter organization, there is both a denial and suppression of African identity. Within these organizations the use of Greek letters, symbols, ethos, and terminology is common. Furthermore, the embracing of Greek culture and the denial of the African ethos creates a paradox regarding the identity of its members. The Black Greek-letter tradition was a product of African American struggle for recognition and respect, and despite steady gains in their material well-being, exemplified by the presence of an educated Black middle class; African Americans as a group have remained outside American life, tolerated but proscribed—a separate caste[15]. However within certain segments of the Black community, the Black Greek-letter organization served as a symbol of Black assimilation into an elite white academic tradition that further distanced themselves from the ordinary Black masses.[16]

Paula Giddings was one of the first researchers to propose that Black Greek-letter organizations be understood as part of a social movement, and not simply social organizations that occasionally perform good deeds.[17] Scholars often see social movements as complicated and contingent sets of interactions between localized and geographically distinct movements of individuals, groups, and organizations that enter into a larger coalition of interrelated activities. The need to establish a "free space" and a collective identity propelled the Black Greek-letter organization from a small localized group of college students into a towering social and political entity at the national level. Hence, the free space can be described as a protected area, a safe haven, a sequestered social site, or a small scale setting which provides activist autonomy from dominant groups where activist can nurture oppositional movement identities.[18]

The allure and appeal of the Black fraternity and sorority cannot be overstated. Black Greek-letter organizations have a rich history of service, activism, and leadership training.[19] These institutions from their initial creation consisted of physicians, lawyers, teachers, and other professional occupations. Often seen as elitist, membership into the ranks of these organizations afforded its members more social access and mobility throughout American society. While in college, many African Americans men joined Black Greek-letter organizations as meaningful outlets by which one gains cultural connection, support, as well as self, social, and civic awareness.[20] Presently Black fraternities and sororities claim approximately 800,000 members including both current and alumni members.[21] These organizations have strict academic and social service membership requirements and often recruit their members from highly competitive colleges and universities. This aspect positions them as one of the most important and influential African-American institutions in the country. Each year they offer various scholarships and conduct numerous service programs, such as voter registration drives, mentoring programs, and they have coordinated highly organized educational efforts throughout the nation. Many members felt they had an obligation to use their gifts, privileges, and membership in the middle class to help other African Americans.[22]

The notion that social movements hang together or cluster in some fashion is a generally accepted notion among some sociologists.[23] In particular, noted sociologists Doug McAdam, David Snow, and Robert Benford have written numerous articles and books regarding the relationship or clustering of social movements and their relation to culture. Furthermore, it is suggested that specific movements within any historical era are tributaries of a general stream of agitation. This clustering of social movements under the same theoretical outlook is referred to as a master frame.[24] It is this "framing" which allows individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label events so that individuals may make sense of them, and therefore interpret them from their own perspective.

Cycles of protests can best be described as sequences of escalating collective action that are of greater frequency and intensity than normal. These spread throughout various sectors and regions of society and involve both new techniques of protest and new forms of organizations that in combination with traditional organizational infrastructures, determine the course and direction of the cycle.[25]

Sociologist Doug McAdam's work on cycles of protest showed that the Civil Rights Movement was not a steady stream, but a series of bursts of action each driven by a tactical innovation: bus boycotts, freedom rides, sit-ins, demonstrations, and riots. These scholars have also noted the many ways that protest actions cannot be understood in isolation, but rather need to be viewed as interactions with the police and other social control forces, particularly as the police learn more effective methods of repression over time.

Naturally over time one social movement affects another, as tactics and frames diffuse and produce the effects that can be referred to as movement spillover.[26] The civil rights demonstrations and marches of the early 1960s not only led to civil rights legislation, but indirectly fostered the increased militancy and anger of Blacks as it fueled attitudes which contributed to the wave of Black urban riots.

Master frames do work in conjunction with the cycles of protests theory; however these are not interchangeable terms. Frames are not ends in themselves, but rather catalysts to larger social change. McAdam (1996) identifies six strategic hurdles that movements must be able to surmount if they are to achieve change: (1) attract new recruits, (2) sustain the morale and commitment of current adherents, (3) generate media coverage, (4) mobilize the support of "bystander publics", (5) constrain the social control options of its opponents, and (6) ultimately shape public policy and state action.[27]

In his analysis of the framing of the Civil Rights Movement, McAdam also explores and explains the way Martin Luther King, Jr. drew upon both conventional and novel themes to construct a coherent and resonant master frame. McAdam writes:

> First in his unique blending of familiar Christian themes and conventional democratic theory, King succeeded in grounding the movement in two of the ideational bedrocks of American culture. Second, the theme of Christian forgiveness that runs throughout King's thought was deeply reassuring to a white America burdened by guilt and a near phobic fear of black anger and violence. King's emphasis on Christian charity and nonviolence promised a redemptive and peaceful healing to America's long-standing racial divide. Third, King's invocation of Gandhian philosophy added an exotic intellectual patina to his thought that many in the Northern media (and Northern intellectuals in general) found appealing. Finally, while exploring and tracing out a variety of themes in King's thought, it should be noted that multiplicity of themes granted the media as well as the general public multiple points of ideological contact with the movement. So, secular liberals who might be unmoved by King's reading of Christian theology, did resonate with his views and application of democratic theory.[28]

McAdam goes on to explore how a multiplicity of perspectives on frames lent tactical innovation, as freedom rides, sit-ins and other provocative, nonviolent and highly dramatic events became part of the Civil Rights arsenal. One proof of the durability of the Civil Rights frame has been its adaptability and connection to such movements as Women's Rights, Gay Rights, and Latino Rights.[29]

Advocates for all these movements have been able to draw upon the highly available signifying elements of the Civil Rights frame to explain convincingly to the American public why discrimination and segregation against these populations deserved government intervention.

Congressman John Lewis' account of his personal experiences during the 1960s exemplifies the use and application of master frames across different eras. Although the Civil Rights Movement and the Immigrant Movement of 2003 have occurred more than forty years apart, the philosophy and principles that unite them remain the same, and thus are linked through the use of a master frame. Lewis states:

> For me and for my fellow Freedom Riders from the 1960s, the civil rights movement cannot and will not come to an end until everyone in America enjoys the rights and liberties guaranteed by the founding covenants of our nation. Which brings me to the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, a movement that carries the struggle for civil rights for all forward into the new century. [30]
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> Like the Freedom Rides of 1961, Freedom Ride 2003 calls on ordinary people to do extraordinary things: to put their bodies on the line at a moment in American history when immigration is a volatile issue everywhere; to stand up for their rights and the rights of many others; to call attention to bad laws that harm good people; and to challenge the federal government to act where it seems determined not to.[31]

Although sociologists Doug McAdam, David Snow, and Robert Benford do acknowledge and accept the theory behind the cycles of protests; the cycle of protests linking the creation of the Black Greek-letter organization of the early twentieth century has not been fully explored by scholars. Unfortunately, social movement research has not adequately addressed the role that sonorities [and fraternities] play in Black communities.[32] Furthermore, social scientists engaged in serious research have either ignored or deemed insignificant organizations associated with or supported by African Americans.[33] Scholars have only turned their attention to the Black Greek-letter organization in the past decade or so, and this research has been limited.[34]

Since its inception as a discipline, many contemporary sociologists such as Robert Nisbet, author of *The Quest for Community: A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom* and founder of the Department of Sociology at Berkeley and Charles Murray author of *the Bell Curve,* have relied upon the use of pragmatic thought to guide their research efforts. As such many of these mainstream sociologists have maintained that their scholarly efforts are grounded in the scientific application and recognition of information used to explain social phenomena. Consequently the use and application of culture was viewed as a contradiction to pragmatic thought as it related to emotion and passion, and therefore seen as an unreliable source for academic inquiry.

Additionally the use of culture as an area of emphasis involves an interdisciplinary approach that many conservative scholars in sociology are not willing to embark upon. Moreover, by dismissing the use of culture as a variant; alternative attitudes with racist overtones and intolerant rhetoric have substituted the discourse.

It is at this point where the role of the Black fraternities within the Black community gains importance. Because of the formation of the Black fraternity, African American consciousness has attempted to gain a new level of agency from within. Social movements usually utilize larger cultural movements, events, or social phenomena as a master frame. It is this master frame which ultimately allows individuals to make sense of their actions by comparison so that they may locate and label events and ultimately interpret them from their own perspective. The Black Greek-letter organization engaged in a process known as frame extension whereby an existing movement can incorporate new participants by extending the boundaries of the proposed frame to include or encompass the views, interests, or sentiments of targeted groups. (This incorporation of new individuals can occur within the confines of the original movement) As such, a movement may incorporate new members into its ranks by adopting new ideas in order to attract new recruits.[35]

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century many countries in Western Europe and the United States were consumed by the idea of nationalism. Nationalism is described as a desire by a large group of people (such as people who share the same culture, history, language, etc.) to form a separate and independent nation of their own.[36] This view often includes the belief that one's relationship to the nation is of primary importance. It is also used to describe a movement to establish or protect a homeland (usually an autonomous state) for a specific ethnic group. In some cases the identification of a homogeneous national culture is usually combined with a negative view of other races or cultures.

In 1870 Germany became an independent nation as a result of the Franco-Prussian War and began to create its own national consciousness.[37] In1871 after years of civil war, the Italian peninsula unified and Italians began to create their own national identity[38]. In 1871 the Paris Commune took place as French anarchists, socialists, and members of the working class seized control of the French government[39]. In 1865 the American Civil War ended and a new American consciousness which consolidated northern and southern attitudes into a unified identity[40] In all of the aforementioned countries, these revolution resulted in the creation of modern attitudes towards citizenship and nationalism.

It was during this time period that the Black Greek-letter organization emerged as a social organization that in part reflected African American attitudes toward nationalism and identity. As African American students in predominantly white colleges and historically Black colleges and universities (HBCU) began to apply for and gain membership in Greek fraternities and sororities the necessity of a parallel Greek organization that mirrored African American social experience came into existence.

Between the years 1906 and 1920 seven Black Greek-letter fraternities and sororities were created at the collegiate level as a response to racism, the post-Reconstruction failure of equality in American society, and the need for African Americans to create their own visions of social reform.

Since the early nineteenth century the college fraternity had become a common social organization at most white colleges and universities. Like white fraternities and sororities, Black Greek-letter organizations were established by groups of like-minded individuals who desired to maintain contact and provide activities and brotherhood or sisterhood for their group.[41] Accordingly, during the early twentieth century by modeling much of their structure and philosophy after the white fraternity, the Black Greek-letter organization was able to reproduce a similar social institution at many black and white institutions of learning. And as such, the existence of the Black fraternity was viewed as a routine social organization.

The Black Greek-letter organization became an articulation of racial and ethnic identity used by African American students to locate and interpret events from their perspectives. Thus, as a response to racism and the post-Reconstruction failure of equality many African Americans were motivated to create their own institutions that afforded them a measure of equality within American society. Although Black Greek-letter organizations began as a mechanism for social interaction among African Americans, they eventually became active in the fight for civil rights due to the racial inequality in the country.[42] Efforts were slow and steady, with the various Black Greek-letter organizations chipping away at the racist polices at the local and national level.[43]

Once established, the Black Greek letter organization began to initiate its members to embody elements of agency. This allowed its members to actively create a conscious attitude regarding their national consciousness. In this respect, the Black Greek-letter organization became a cultural incubator which mirrored the larger society's preoccupation with nationalism and agency. This frame bridging used by the Black Greek-letter organization involved the coupling of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem. This type of pairing involves the linkage of a movement to un-mobilized sentiment pools or public opinion preference clusters of people who share similar views or grievances, but who lacked an organizational base. [44]

Although there is limited amount of scholarship that directly relates to the emergence of the Black Greek-letter organization as a means of social protest, scholars know that social movements within the Black community did not occur in a vacuum. Each social movement was built upon both the failures and achievements of the movement that preceded it. The Black Greek-letter organization is a social movement that was in part responsible for the collection of social movements which began in the 1920s and continued throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

Thus, the Harlem Renaissance, Marcus Garvey's "Back to Africa Movement", the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Arts Movement, and the emergence of Hip-Hop culture owe their initial popularity and later success to the formation of Black Greek-letter organizations. The founders and leaders of these organizations were in the vanguard of social change and made significant contributions to the widespread liberation, political, moral, temperance, and social reform movements that characterized the nineteenth century United States.[45]

It is through the free space created by the Black Greek-letter organization which has shaped the characteristics of the social movement which followed. By exploring the four critical areas social scientists can give insight to the rise of the Black Greek-letter organization not only as a social movement, but as a means of cultural expression. Furthermore, by exploring the historical and sociological factors which gave birth to these organizations, the direction of future social movements can also be predicted.

The three essential aspects surrounding the study of the Black fraternity as a social movement materialize around the ideas of cultural solidarity, the free space, and the conscious attitudes developed within the organizations by its members. One of the first attempts to document the social reality of African Americans in an urban environment was W.E.B. Dubois' *The Philadelphia Negro*. The synopsis set forth by Dubois posits that at the beginning of the twentieth century the internal conflicts produced by the forced segregation of the African American community produced a series of social dysfunctions (which included lack of proper housing, high rates of unemployment, crime, overcrowding, improper sanitation, police brutality, disease, and poverty) that were concentrated in the African American communities of many northern cities, such as Philadelphia, New York City, Detroit, Chicago and Washington, DC. These internal conflicts were further complicated by European immigrants who settled in many northern cities and were in direct competition with African Americans for proper housing, better employment opportunities, and favorable social standing.

For centuries, the African American community had been victimized by violent and often destructive advances of both the federal government and vigilante mob violence. Whether in the form of legal government policies such as slavery and segregation or unlawful aggression such as lynching's and race riots, the African American community has always had to fight against those who would deny them full equality. In order to shield themselves from these violent outbreaks the Black community generated various methods of protection. One such method was the creation of social organizations and mutual benefit societies.

In his seminal work *From Slavery to Freedom* John Hope Franklin states that fraternal societies and mutual benefit organizations were a vital addition to the Black community. Franklin reaffirms the importance of establishing benevolent or benefit societies by stating: they served as important training grounds where Negros could secure business experience, and they helped to develop habits of self-help that seemed to be more imperative as the new century opened."[46]

Franklin also contends that these organizations provided the foundation and generated ideas that helped in the formulation of programs, which were designed to help alleviate the socially undesirable conditions fostered within American society, as they pertained to the treatment of African Americans. Through regular meetings, these local organizations pooled their funds, resources, and any other means they had available to aid those who suffered from financial and physical hardships. Apart from churches, fraternal organizations and benevolent societies have long been the largest and most durable organizations in Black communities.[47] These fraternal societies although small in size, provided the geniuses for Black leadership and contributed immensely to the intellectual and social development of the Black community in the twentieth century.

Traditionally fraternal groups have played a vital role in the development of pride and self-esteem for African Americans. At their meetings members not only enjoyed the camaraderie of their fellow members, but they also received financial support in their endeavors. Their selective nature provided for a higher than average intelligence among its members and leadership. By the year 1920, fraternal organizations had become a permanent fixture within the Black community. Benevolent and fraternal organizations grew steadily throughout the nineteenth century in both urban and rural areas, all over the country.[48] *The Negro Yearbook of 1920—1921* reported approximately 60 fraternal organizations with an estimated membership of 2.2 million people.[49] Most of these organizations explained that their specific aims and goals were to liberate the Black race from their inferior positions as second class citizens within American society. Many [of these organizations] were national in scope and dozens of others were active at the local level.[50] Their goals included creating racial equality for African Americans, fostering a sense of self respect among its members, mount an organized opposition to the Ku Klux Klan, create a united Negro front on social issues, producing higher wages for Black workers, and to seek cooperation with other colored races for racial equality within a predominantly white society.

The first two decades of the twentieth century were extremely violent both in the north as well as in the south for African Americans.[51] Murder, intimidation, physical torture, and economic pressures were some of the methods employed by Whites to bring about the total subjection of the African American community. Black landowners lost their land through chicanery, while Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers were trapped in endless debt to white landlords. Meanwhile a system of peonage was also introduced, whereby Black prisoners were often rented out by the county to work off sentences and fines.[52] From 1882 to 1927, 4,743 Black people were lynched[53], while thousands of missing African Americans were unaccounted for. Economic conditions, disfranchisement, and murder drove thousands of Black people from the cotton fields of the south to the industrial cities of the north.

As African Americans continued their migration from the south to the north, the Black population grew outward towards the surrounding White areas; creating an atmosphere of violence, intimidation and fear. This hostile environment of the early twentieth century created a social and political atmosphere that allowed limited opportunities for individuals or groups within the African American community to engage in lawful methods of public demonstration.

By understanding American attitudes regarding race, culture, and class we can better understand the environment that helped to forge the creation of the Black fraternity. Although the characteristics and components that influence and support the invention of culture are fluid and ever changing; the ideas that surround the cultural innovation of race and class have remained the same.

Social Darwinist dogma was wedded to white superiority, as thoughts of African American inferiority dominated the racialized cultural and intellectual landscape of America.[54] Many of the racist attitudes shared by Americans were conceived during the Victorian era. Although racist beliefs existed prior to the nineteenth century; the Victorian era cemented many of these theories into mainstream American thought. England was the center of Victorian culture and during the nineteenth century American culture was enamored with English high culture. During the nineteenth century theories of race were advanced both by the scientific community and the periodical presses. At the start of the twentieth century philosophies central to the idea of race dominated both academic and non-academic circles.

Throughout the Victorian era western literature argued that the African was poetic, light-hearted and imaginative, highly emotional, playful, passionate, and sentimental. However these were characteristics the Victorians also associated with children. Thus, the African was portrayed as immature and in need of guidance by others. Black emotion was contrasted unfavorably with the English virtues of reason, masculinity and pragmatism. These were all arguments, which conveniently supported the notion of White supremacy. Both Victorian Science (pseudosciences such as phrenology) and popular literature were convinced that Black people and members of the lower classes were: irrational, immature, superstitious, deviant, and sexually promiscuous.

Much of our current view of race was conceived in the eighteenth century by biologist Carl Linnaeus who classified people into four groups—black, red, yellow, and white.[55] With the arrival of the nineteenth and twentieth century thoughts regarding race conceived during the previous Victorian era did not dissipate, as the overall impact of these racist philosophies greatly affected the African American community. Recently biologists have concluded that race is a product of culture and not genetics. Moreover societies must decide whether the world has four races or 40 or 400.[56] Although visible differences such as the shape of the nose and skin color do exist, biologists' contend that the lines drawn between races are not based on any biological reality.

Professor Pamela Sanker states: "It's demonstrated that there's no scientific basis for assuming we are naturally fundamentally divided into different groups."[57] Nevertheless, despite these findings, the issue of race still continues to be a divisive problem within American society.

Although a considerable amount of literature has been published within the last ten years regarding the history and function of the Black Greek-letter organization, many of these works fail to evaluate these organizations as social movements within the Black community. One such book is Lawrence Ross, Jr.'s *The Divine Nine*. The intention of Ross' work was to provide a history of the organization of African American organizations that "stress[es] education, philanthropy, self-improvement and excellence."[58]

Although this book provides some historical background on the founding of the organizations, many historians find it unsatisfactory for its reliance on anecdotal information and its lack of documentation. In the end, *The Divine Nine* provokes, but fails to directly address significant questions such as the course and direction of the Black Greek-letter organizations. Overall the book serves as substitute for the lack of scholarly work and research dedicated to the understanding of the Black fraternity.

Consequently, the majority of writing that has been done on Black Greek-letter organizations attempts to concentrate primarily on those historical aspects that seek to provide its members with a grand and often superficial view of the organizations' accomplishments. This analysis often includes the documentation of the organizations most illustrious and influential members and their contribution to the social welfare of the Black community. Accordingly, any review of relevant literature must be multifaceted. First, such an analysis must seek to examine, clarify, and define the many different aspects of the culture of a social movement. Secondly, such a review must attempt to examine the social conditions which give birth to social movements. And, finally, such a review must also seek to isolate Black Greek-letter organizations and determine whether they constitute a social movement within the Black community.

Often ignored and rarely acknowledged by mainstream sociologists, the historical contours (rising poverty, social inequity, high unemployment), which gave birth to social movements within the African American community are essential to organizing social movements. In addition to the aforementioned communication and mobilization aspects of a social movement, the social grievances or community crisis will often determine the actual need for a social movement. And if the members of a community harbor no grievances or feelings of social injustice, or if the members of a community fail to articulate these feelings to the greater society, the social movement will cease to exist as a viable vehicle for social change.

Within the Black community social grievances exist primarily as a result of segregation and discrimination. It is within this context that residents of these communities experience a variety of grievances generated by harsh adverse living conditions. Hence, the Futrell and Simi (2004) findings place much attention on the isolation and self segregation aspect of social organizations and the social movements which occur from the organizations' activities. Although their study of isolated groups was initially done using white supremacist groups, i.e. the Aryan Brotherhood as models; the initial study done by Futrell and Simi does suggest that the isolation of social organizations from the greater society can foster a sense of kinship and solidarity amongst its members.

It is this isolation and self-segregation from the dominant group which creates a separate conscious attitude that is responsible for the creation of a culture of mass protest. Within these safe spaces, protected areas, sequestered social sites, or havens is where these small-scale settings provide activist autonomy from dominant groups where they can nurture oppositional movement identities. Within this submerged network the process of creating collective identities first begins. The collective identity that comes to exist as a result of the internal and external stress exerted upon a community comes to exist and act as part of the movement culture. The social process, which creates the collective identity, is tied with the everyday routines of everyday life. This affirmation and routinization of behavior associated with the collective identity enables individuals to identify with the movement and see themselves as an intricate part of the movement, thus creating the idea of inclusiveness, rather than exclusiveness.[59] Within these cultural incubators new identities are constructed and a new alternate perception of the world is created. Just as the "halfway houses" throughout the southern United States served as cultural incubators for creating collective identity before the onset of the modern Civil Rights era, the Black Greek-letter organization acted as a cultural incubator of community grievances and protest culture.

Within the Black Greek-letter organization it is the framing of the social movement which acts as the template used to link other social movements together. As a result of this frame alignment, a theoretical outlook is created which helps to raise the consciousness and awareness of grievances held by different groups; thus articulating a sense of unity by adding clarity or giving meaning to the social movement. This solidarity in turn acts as a binding agent which provides the social movement with a unifying master frame. Once united under a theoretical frame, individuals are better able to organize tactics and objectives to ensure the movement's success.

The founders of the Black Greek-letter organizations were able to create a movement that was united against racial discrimination by framing their organizations with the familiar aspects found in within White fraternal culture. As a result, the Black Greek-letter organization was the product of the African American struggle for recognition and respect.[60]

Moreover by combining the Greek tradition with their own vision of social reform, the founders of Black Greek-letter organization would establish a cadre of twentieth century elites who would lodge protests against lynching, lobby for civil rights, campaign for literacy and social welfare, and promote scholastic achievement among the growing ranks of educated African Americans.[61]

The cycles of protest theory has demonstrated that the civil rights demonstrations and marches of the early 1960s not only led to civil rights legislation, but indirectly fostered the increased militancy and anger of Blacks which contributed to the wave of Black urban rebillions. The Black Power Movement quickly emerged as a result of this new direction and new tactics with the Black community. Where the Black Power Movement sought to address the political and economic concerns for the Black community, the Black Arts Movement addressed the cultural needs of the Black community. The Black Arts Movement in turn, was a direct inspiration for activists who studied the histories and writings of previous Black movement activists, which then resulted in the creation of a movement which focused not only on political militancy but also embodied ideas of art, literature, cultural aesthetics, and political inclusion. Hence, it was the emergence of the Black Arts Movement that was greatly responsible for influencing other cultural and political movements both in and out of the Black community, such as the "La Raza" movement, the feminists of the 1970s, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender social movements of the 1980s.

Hence, the emergence of the Black Arts Movement became a sociopolitical movement whose master frame was greatly responsible for influencing other cultural movements both in and out of the Black community. And although the Civil Rights movement was successful in securing equal access to public accommodations, it did not address the economic and cultural needs within the Black community. Where the Civil Rights movement failed to address certain grievances of the community, the frame of the Civil Rights movement was transformed to incorporate new participants by extending the boundaries of the existing frame to include or encompass the views, interests, or sentiments of new groups to create a new culture of protest that later solidified as the Black Arts Movement.

The creation of the Black fraternity was in part fostered by the isolation and segregation of the Black community. This isolation then leads to the formation of a free space where members were able to nurture oppositional identities. Just as the members of the White Power movement used paraphernalia, literature, and coded language to creative an alternative view of reality, many African American organizations have also attempted to do the same.

There is rich tradition of African Americans utilizing aspects of traditional Anglo culture in order to articulate the grievances and desires of the Black community. This assimilation of African and European culture has been an essential component of Black survival. Starting with the creation of Richard Allen's African Methodist Church in 1816, the Black church became a social organization that combined elements of traditional African culture with that of European culture to create a new vision of existence in the Black community. [62]

Within these organizations it is up to the individual members to decide which cultural elements they choose to embody. Although the Black organization can exhibit both African and European cultural elements, it is ultimately the individuals within these organizations who will gravitate toward a cultural identity that resonates most with its members. Accordingly, the most critical step with the process of cultural solidarity is the personal choice or agency made by the individuals or members of the social organization.

In a world free from the oppression of White supremacy an organization with a majority of African American members would be free to exhibit the traditional cultural values and mores of African culture. However under White supremacy, African cultural identity has been suppressed by an interventionist culture and Black organizations were generally not permitted to openly reflect elements of African culture. And consequently, amongst African people, African cultural elements are always present, and accordingly when elements of the culture exist within an organization, the members of the organization must take full advantage of it, and thus, embrace it.

Asante writes:

> It is like a fish swimming in water, it cannot escape the water. Its choice is whether to swim or not, that is to activate. There is nothing the fish can do about the existence of the water. [63]

In order to shield against these attacks, the Black community has made an attempt to surround themselves with characteristics of African culture. This use of traditional culture has acted as a buffer to insulate them from the harmful effects of White supremacy. Throughout history, diaspora Africans have created replicas of African communities in the American South, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The African characteristics found in these communities reflect the desire of these groups to return to Africa, and as such, the relationship that African people have had with their traditional culture has always remained a key influence in their lives.

At the turn of the twentieth century when cohorts of young African American students at Cornell University, Howard University, and Indiana University established the first Black fraternities. The free space and subsequent agency that followed served as a binding agent for the preservation of oppositional cultural autonomy. As such, the development and conceptualization of consciousness used by an organization operating within an Afrocentric paradigm can provide the necessary tools for the mental liberation and cultural reclamation of African people. Furthermore, this free space of consciousness provided the foundation and the access for African people to realize, understand, and accept the need for reclaiming an African consciousness.

Emerging from this culture of oppression was the need for the Black community to create safe havens where community leaders could develop new alternative methods of combating racial prejudice and discrimination in American society. In this environment the historical contours and sociological factors created led to the emergence of the Black Greek-letter organization. Overtime these organizations became the vehicle used by the Black community to safeguard its rights and articulate community grievances. And thus, the development of these separate enclaves acted as free spaces or safe havens of Black thought which later evolved into separate streams of cultural attitudes and conscious identities within the Black community.

By combining the Greek tradition with their own vision of social reform, the founders of these Black Greek-letter organizations would establish a new tradition. Thus, the Black Greek-letter organization was a product of the African American struggle for recognition and identity. And despite the economic gains made by the Black community following Reconstruction, the presence of an educated Black middle class at the start of the twentieth century African Americans remained outside mainstream American life. Even as they began to build institutions of higher learning African American students still faced isolation and exclusion from white campuses and American society[64]. As a result of this alienation Africans Americans at predominantly white colleges turned inward for social intimacy, mutual support, and status.[65] But despite its shortcomings, the Black Greek-letter organization should be remembered as one of the first social movements of the Black community.

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